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ABSTRACT

This issue of a quarterly publication for school principals discusses the role of principals in providing inclusive education for all students, including those with disabilities. It offers practical information on the following topics: goals in meeting the needs of special education students; effective principal behaviors in leading special education; methods of encouraging acceptance of special education students by their peers; methods of incorporating special education into the school-centered decision making model; ways to improve attendance of special education students; how principals can facilitate cooperation between regular and special education; determining what classroom techniques are effective with mainstreamed students; what behavior management strategies to use with students who have emotional disabilities; ways to help parents accept their child's special education placement; involving parents in their child's schooling; support services available for parents; improving the effectiveness of general education teachers with special education students; the appropriateness of community-based instruction; determination of the least restrictive environment; legal implications of mainstreaming for general education staff; the use of finite resources to satisfy an infinite number of special education needs; differences between integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion; a rationale for identifying students for special education and then including them in regular education classrooms; and the need for staff development. (JDD)

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A quarterly publication for principals to assist in delivering quality service to all students—inclusive of those with disabilities

# THE PRINCIPAL LETTERS:

## PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

A Cooperative Publication: The Council of Administrators in Special Education & The National Academy on the Principalship in Special Education

ED 367 118

Vol. 9 Fall, 1992

### PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

Welcome to the 1992-93 year of the Principal Letters. As always there will be a total of four issues, including this one entitled Principal Leadership. An order form and list of topics for the this year's issues are located at the back of this letter.

Principal leadership continues to be an essential ingredient in any school that is providing education to students with disabilities. This issue examines several areas of interest to principals including role relationships, behavior management, working with parents, instructional strategies, placement options, legal issues and resources. Questions which are often asked by principals are addressed with descriptions of practices that work.

This letter is a compilation of research done over several years and has been summarized for you by Barbara Tourgee and Linda DeClue. Both are elementary principals in Virginia and Indiana.

We know the remaining issues of the 1992-93 subscription year will bring you thought provoking and relevant information. Feel free to write or call us with comments or topics which you would find helpful in future issues of the Principal Letters.

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## PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

**What should the goal be in meeting the needs of special education student?**

The educational goals for every child are that s/he will strive to realize his/her individual potential, to develop attitudes that foster lifelong learning, and to become a happy and productive citizen. To ensure that the students with disabilities are afforded the same opportunity for success as their non-disabled peers, the goals for the educational program for students with disabilities need to be grounded in several basic assumptions.

a. All persons with disabilities are full human beings with the same civil and human rights.
b. All persons with disabilities are capable of human development.
c. All persons with disabilities have an inherent right to have their basic human needs met in settings and environments that are as normalizing as possible with whatever supports and maintenance they might require.
d. Persons with disabilities should be treated more alike than different from their non-disabled peers.
e. Education for students with disabilities should be a preparation for postschool environments.

The assumptions accept differentness and urge familial and community integration. They do not mean that all people are the same, nor that adults with disabilities will become non-disabled. They do not mean that those with disabilities will be able in all cases to keep up with the other students. They do mean that students with disabilities should have the opportunity to attend school in the local school setting with appropriate support and services.

**What behaviors does a Principal need to be a special education instructional leader?**

The characteristics of any effective leader include the effectiveness in the areas of judgment, problem analysis, decisiveness, sensitivity, communication, and organizational skills. In addition, a leader in a setting where students with disabilities are integrated with non-disabled students needs to have a good working knowledge of special education and the laws that govern the operation of special education services.

A number of behaviors have generally been observed in principals who facilitate successfully integrated special education programs.

a. The principal clearly states his/her position about the education of students with disabilities. The values and beliefs of the faculty/staff are shared and a collective values statement is generated by consensus.
b. The principal is visible, proactive, and committed to the stated values.
c. The principal's expectations are clear and s/he has good written and verbal communication skills.
d. The principal provides ample time for preparation and planning.
e. The principal encourages parent involvement.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Allocate time in informal staff settings to interact with staff about educational values for youngsters with disabilities. Use the tape "Regular Lives" to generate discussion.
2. State the consensus goals in positive language that communicates a "one staff for all children" message.



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3. Display the goals in the building and state them in written communications to the community on a regular basis.
4. Actions speak louder than words. Make decisions that reinforce the spoken values and beliefs. For example:

   a. spread the special education classrooms throughout the main part of the building to increase the amount of possible socialization.
   b. include special education classes when doing informal classroom visits.
   c. daily seek out the more challenging students (disabled and non-disabled) and positively interact with them.
   d. attend eligibility meetings as often as possible.
   e. support regular education teachers who are mainstreaming and integrating students.
   f. include students with disabilities in recognition programs which celebrate the success of all students.

**What can principals do to encourage the acceptance of special education students by their peers?**

The success of integration and mainstreaming of special education students relies heavily on an attitude of acceptance from central and building administrators, faculty/staff, students and community. In the school setting, the principal sets the tone for acceptance by modeling a positive attitude. If the principal's words and actions communicate the value that all children can learn and that they learn best in a natural school setting, it is more likely that the students and staff will support the students with disabilities and the integrated activities.

The degree of success that a school has in providing integrated services is reflected in the attitudes of the staff. An atmosphere of acceptance will foster the development of student attitudes in which they learn that individual differences are meant, not to divide, but to enrich lives. In developing understanding and altruistic relationships, care must be taken to guard against creating a "helper vs. helped" mentality that can lead to condescending social attitudes toward youngsters with disabilities. Opportunities should be provided for all students to contribute positively to the school's activities.

Nonacceptance of the students with disabilities by staff, students, and community often is due to a lack of knowledge or understanding of disabilities. Opportunities must be provided for discussions about disabilities and the education that the school will provide. Whenever possible, the sharing of information should occur in the school prior to the arrival of a special education class or individual student with a disability that is unfamiliar to the students and staff.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Prior to the placement of students with disabilities into the home school, arrange for visitation of staff and students to the site where the students are presently being served. Contact prior to their arrival will facilitate a smooth transition for the disabled and non-disabled populations.
2. Conduct parent workshops to further educate them about disabled populations in the school. At the conclusion, enlist their help as volunteer tutors.
3. Encourage participation of students with disabilities by arranging for transportation for extracurricular activities.
4. Encourage pairing of students with disabilities with non-disabled students for tutoring. Whenever possible, place the disabled student in the helping role.
5. Provide students with disabilities with opportunities to take on jobs of responsibility so they are viewed as contributors to the school community.
6. Ensure that students with disabilities have some daily schedule (i.e. lunch, hall passing times) as their non-disabled peers.

7. Assign lockers to students with disabilities.
8. Include students with disabilities in special events such as graduation, award ceremonies, yearbook pictures, and school events covered by the media.
9. Award standing diplomas to students with disabilities.
10. Encourage the integration of disability issues into the general education curriculum.

**How can special education be incorporate into the school centered decision making model?**

Discussions of school restructuring usually call for incorporation of more decision making at the local school level. Special education has been operating local school committees in the form of screening and eligibility teams for some time, so the structure for collaborative decision making is already in place. The preassessment team model used in some states also encourages teaming regular and special educators to provide suggestions to teachers before referral is made for special education services.

With the new emphasis on staff involvement in decision making, principals will need to make conscious efforts to include special education teachers on general education committees and projects. One of the goals should be to erase the labels "regular" and "special" and refer to all as teachers.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Advise the school special education committees to include classroom teachers whenever possible. Provide class coverage for classroom teachers who wish to attend placement committee meetings.
2. Make deliberate attempts to involve special education and classroom teachers in general education work groups. Without labeling them as different. The goal is to eliminate any barriers that exist by creating a sense of one staff for all students. Teaming classroom and special education teachers as co-chairpersons encourages cooperation in school improvement efforts.

**How can the attendance of special education students be improved?**

Special education students do not differ markedly from other students in their responses to interventions with regard to improving school attendance. Recognitions of an extrinsic nature may serve to motivate some students. The more powerful intrinsic motivators are the feelings of success and being valued as a person. Special education students often have poor ego strength and low confidence levels. They need to feel some small measure of success and happiness each day. Students with disabilities must feel that s/he is succeeding—one notch at a time.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Present certificates to all students who show progress in the area of attendance.
2. Call the parents of students with poor attendance to help identify the cause of frequent absence and provide support if needed.
3. Assign visible jobs of responsibility to students with disabilities to help increase their feeling of value to daily school activity and to help them gain acceptance from their non-disabled peers.

## ROLE RELATIONSHIP

**How can cooperation between regular education and special education be facilitated?**

The task is largely one of developing a sense of responsibility for all children. A mutual understanding and commitment to the premise that all children will learn must be the basis for cooperation between general education and special education. Some classroom teachers feel that the addition of a disabled student will be a burden for him/her. The tension is exacerbated if the teacher feels s/he is

unable to meet the child's educational needs. Sufficient support must be provided to lower anxiety and dispel the notion that the child is being "dumped" in the classroom.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Encourage and reward teaming efforts between general education and special education teachers.
2. Schools using a middle school organizational model might assign a special education teacher to each teacher cluster rather than organizing special education as a separate group. Schools who have done so report that it has helped the spirit of cooperation.
3. Plan regular informal settings for the entire staff to have meaningful dialogue about shared values. Shared belief systems have a way of bonding people and energizing the progress toward the stated goals. Synergy is the key to a successful integration program.
4. Provide special education teachers with scheduled consultation time to work with teachers during open periods.
5. Provide space on building bulletins or in newsletters for teachers to share suggestions for inclusion/integration activities.
6. Provide staff development activities which focus on collaboration skills and conflict resolution skills.

**How can special education supervisors assist building administrators?**

The principal is responsible for the educational programs for all of the children in the building. The special education supervisor's responsibility is to help the principal carry out his/her responsibilities. Even the most committed principals who exercise their right to ownership of the special education program need the support of supervisors. Their knowledge of programs and regulations are invaluable to principals. Providing materials, facilitating inclusion efforts, consulting with teachers are all services that can be provided by special education supervisors.

**Principals need guidance in supervising special education programs. What help is available?**

In addition to the expertise provided by the local supervisory staff, many local school districts provide optional inservice on a regular basis. Generally, new principals are inserviced during the first year or two of service and optionally for refresher purposes thereafter. Basic handbooks for quick reference may also be provided for office use. Help is sometimes available in the form of materials and staff development through technical assistance centers in the state.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Become familiar with the available printed reference material in the district. If the district does not provide usable documents for principals, request that special education specialists produce a basic guide for your use.
2. Consult with the special education supervisor before making a decision that requires his/her expertise. Then make your decision on behalf of the child who is disabled.
3. Survey the staff about concerns regarding special education and arrange for a professional growth opportunity in the building based on the stated needs/concerns. If local special education specialists are unable to conduct the session(s), contact other local or state assistance centers. If possible, attach non-college credit for recertification to serve as an additional incentive to attend.
4. Become involved in networking with other principals in the region or state that are involved in similar efforts to include students with disabilities.

## BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

### What classroom techniques are effective for classroom teachers with mainstreamed students?

The special education students should be expected to follow the same classroom rules as other students. The classroom behavior management program that is in place is appropriate for all students including most special education students. Programs that provide clearly stated expectations, consistency, fairness, and positive recognition with incentives are generally successful.

Some buildings have a schoolwide behavior plan for all students, in which case, the classroom rules would be determined by the school guidelines. Again, as long as the behavior plan provides clear, reasonable expectations with positive and negative consequences, students with disabilities should be expected to follow the same set of rules.

Should the behavior of the child deteriorate in the general education setting, collaboration between the responsible teachers may produce useful suggestions. Some students may need individual behavior plans to ensure success in the general education program. Children with behavioral problems must be given the opportunity to grow and develop in the direction of appropriate behaviors.

### How do you discipline students with disabilities?

Making appropriate decisions about disciplining any student relies heavily on personal knowledge of the student. Positive reinforcement techniques to encourage desired behaviors and reduce unacceptable ones should be incorporated. Other possible methods include overcorrection and time-out. The child should not be allowed to use his/her physical or mental limitations to manipulate others or avoid responsibility for his/her actions.

A system gaining credibility is gentle teaching, a philosophy and methodology for establishing meaningful and productive relationships with challenging students. The program establishes a bond, teaches the value of reward, and includes consideration of the environment.

### How do you know when the exceptionality is affecting the undesired behavior?

In determining if a child's exceptionality is affecting his/her undesired behavior, you must first have an understanding of the child as an individual. Taking into consideration the current multidisciplinary evaluation which includes his/her history, behavior patterns, and typical responses, a decision could be reached. Even if a child's exceptionality is directly related to the behavior, this does not give him/her permission to continue to exhibit the inappropriate behaviors.

### What are some strategies for principals to use with students with an emotional disability who require referral?

A student with an emotional disability needs to be given a chance to "cool off" before dealing with an incident. Reprimanding or even discussion too soon usually escalates the inappropriate behavior. When the student is in control, allow him/her to tell the story. Discuss what could have been done differently and negotiate a plan for future situations. Have the student write down the commitment for improved behavior and sign it as a contract.

It is important to communicate to the student in a power statement that the behavior is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. When the statement is followed with "or else," it suggests that you expect the behavior to occur again. With cooperative parents, it is very effective to have them come to

school and also tell the student that the behavior must stop.

A consequence closely linked to the behavior is more effective than an artificially created punishment. Writing an action plan to detail appropriate choices is more effective than writing "lines," for example.

Students with emotional disabilities classically feel that the world is happening to them and not that they act on their own environment. They must be frequently reminded that they cannot change the behavior of others, but they can be in control of the way they react.

Consistency is very important. A systematic plan of rewards and consequences helps. Most students respond well to positive attention. One assistant principal made it a practice to play a game of checkers every afternoon with a student who earned the privilege. A principal who was spending an inordinate amount of time on a few students began scheduling a weekly 10 minute conference with the students to discuss progress and plans for improvement. The principal soon found that office referrals declined considerably...practical proof that good discipline plans are self-eliminating.

**Why should discipline procedures for students with emotional disabilities be different?**

Students with emotional disabilities are expected to act like other students but may need to be treated differently. It is the same principle as allowing the hearing impaired to have hearing aids, the blind to have Braille, and the learning disabled to have alternate instructional techniques. When a student has been identified as behavior disordered, then we must accept that there are legitimate reasons which prevent him/her from having the same control as other students. There still must be consequences for inappropriate behavior, individual behavior plans must be developed, and students must be taught acceptable behavior. If they are summarily excluded from the educational environment each time they misbehave, their education will be so disrupted that this learning, as well as academic progress, will not occur. When in doubt, contact your local resource person.

## PARENTS

**What can be done to help parents accept a special education placement after their child is identified to receive services?**

Parents tend to experience a sequence of reactions upon learning of their child's special education needs. The feelings are normal but must be validated by the professionals before a healthy adjustment can be realized. Disbelief, guilt, rejection, shame, denial, hopelessness, insecurity and loneliness characterize some parental reactions. A primary goal must be to assist parents in working through their feelings with their child.

School personnel need to deal sensitively with the range of feelings that may be exhibited during the placement conference. Barriers may have been created as a result of prior unpleasant evaluation experiences. Consequently, good communications throughout the evaluation process will help to build the needed trust that will ensure their support for the final decision.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Make personal contact with parents as soon as a problem is suspected. Communicate at regular intervals during the evaluation process. Acceptance comes more easily to parents who understand the process and who trust that you are working in the best interest of their child.
2. Pair new special education parents with experienced parents who can "show them the ropes" and provide a support system.
3. Invite parents to visit, observe, and/or volunteer in the school.

4. Educate parents about support groups that might be available in the school or the community.
5. Encourage parents to visit other programs to see alternatives. Many parents fear special education because of misinformation. Visitation often takes care of their concerns.

**What support services are available to parents of special education students?**

Traditionally parents look to the school for resources which will help in their child's educational functioning. In addition to the annual IEP update and periodic progress reports from the child's teacher, other resources are offered by many schools. Family counseling, parent support groups, parent advisory councils, parenting training groups, and workshops are just a few of the many possibilities. The level of involvement will vary considerably according to the child's disability, age, and other support systems.

Within the school setting, the school social worker is generally available for consultation regarding community support systems. The school social worker can help the family relate to a formal agency, without feelings of a loss of dignity or control, and with the assumption that agency actions must be related to the client need. In this manner, a segmented approach to obtaining services for the family can be avoided.

A network of community services is also available including mental health, Medicaid, Social Security, welfare, and housing. If a case management program is available, gaps in needed services are identified and integration of school and community resources can be achieved.

**How can special education parents be motivated to become involved in their child's schooling?**

The greatest motivator for parents is to get them caught up in a general attitude that spells S-U-C-C-E-S-S for their child. Above all, parents seek a caring, trustful relationship with professionals who are involved with their child. Previous experiences may influence parental fears, until rapport has been established.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Maintain frequent positive contact and provide an open, friendly environment that welcomes participation by parents of all students in the school.
2. Alert parents to school activities through regular school newsletters.
3. Organize small group workshops to provide suggestions for helping children at home.
4. Have the counselor or teacher schedule informal meetings of parents for the purpose of sharing ideas and frustrations when helping their children at home.
5. Choose convenient times for parent meetings and, if possible, meet at locations other than the school that might be more convenient. Extra efforts on the part of the school communicates the school's eagerness to have parents as a part of the education process.

**What is the parent's role in the education of their special education child?**

P.L. 94-142 mandates the full participation of parents in the evaluation and placement process for special education services and provides for extensive due process procedures to safeguard the rights of the child. Parents should serve as in interested, well-informed advocate to make sure that the child's special needs are met.

In some aspects, the parental role in the education of a disabled child is much the same of that of parents of other children. To some extent, it is quite different. The role generally falls into three levels: general activities involving the majority of the student body; activities which involve parents in the daily life of the school such as workshops or volunteers; and the relationship of the parent to the child and/or the school.

Parents need to be in regular communication with the school. They need to understand the goals written in the IEP so expectations at home are consistent with those at school. Teachers should communicate with parents about involving their children in extracurricular activities by providing them with dates of scheduled events.

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**"Do's and Don't for Professionals"**

*by Fran Smith*
*Community Services Division, United Cerebral Palsy Associations*
*(SEAS Cable, January 1990)*

Looking back over the 30 years as the mother of a daughter with multiple disabilities and a son with cerebral palsy, I feel again the pain and joy of my life. I have also been a "professional advocate" and have worked with hundreds of parents who have sensitized me to professional approaches that build trust with parents. I suspect that the lessons learned can be of use to others traveling down a similar path.

In spite of encounters with professionals who patronized me, discounted my intelligence and feelings, or openly worked against what I was trying to achieve for my own and others' children, I remain convinced that people who work in early intervention, special education, and residential and vocational services want to do good things for children and adults with disabilities. The following comments are offered in the interest of reducing barriers to open, trusting parent/professional relations.

Services and professionals come and go throughout the life of a person with a disability , but parents remain. Their role is to assure that their son or daughter will receive the best, most appropriate services possible, while never being sure just where those services are, or which services are the best and most appropriate. This task will be easier when parents are respected for doing their jobs and when the information and opinions they possess, as the person closest to their child, are respected and incorporated into the development of service plans.

Telling a parent that he or she is doing a good job builds instant rapport between a professional and a parent. It was seven years before anyone told be what I wanted was right and that I had done an outstanding job as a mother of two youngsters with severe disabilities. Those few words of praise bonded me forever to that professional and also got me through lots of rough times in the following years.

Almost every professional discipline instills the notion that the best professionals remain objective about their work—and about the person receiving services. However, parents are not objective about their child. I always trusted the professionals who not only talked to and smiled at my children, but touched them and actually seemed to like them. Professional objectivity is generally misunderstood by parents because it appears to be cold, uncaring aloofness on the part of the professional.

Most parents want reassurance that things will somehow, someday get better. Telling parents, with certainty, that their child will never be able to do this or that may be a way to stop unrealistic thinking, but it also a way to kill hope. Children need the support of someone who believes in them, perhaps against all odds. There were so many things that my daughter accomplished, things that I was told with certainty she would never do, that I have learned to keep my mind open to possibilities. Until we have crystal balls which can show us the future with 100% accuracy, let's err on the side of optimism and hope.

In a successful team, everyone is committed, knows their role and has the skills to do the job. Newcomers, however, may feel intimidated and may not play their role very well. Parents are newcomers

to the service delivery team. Professionals should support and encourage parents to participate effectively as knowledgeable, skilled team members. The teams will function best when there is an atmosphere of trust in which parents feel respected, heard, and supported as equal members of the team.

(Ref. Parents and Families: Advocating Vocational Outcomes for Young Adults with Disabilities, Vol. 5, No. 3)

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## INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

### How can general education teachers be as effective with special education students as specially trained special education teachers?

Considering all of the specialized information now available, it is unrealistic to assume that a teacher can be a specialist in every area. Thus, teachers must rely on other resources, as well as their own creativity. If teachers remember that all children are children first, abilities not limitations tend to be emphasized. Teachers need to know and understand the special needs of the student and be provided the extra resources necessary to provide an appropriate program for all students.

Ideally, the special education teacher should work closely with the classroom teacher. Joint planning and team teaching allows for a cross training experience, and opportunity for all of the students to benefit from different teaching styles that capitalize on the strengths of the teachers. It is an effective mechanism for providing the least restrictive environment with daily supportive services.

Teaching is a lonely job due to isolation from other adult peers. Teaching students with disabilities is a particularly lonely job if the teacher does not receive the necessary support. A collaborative team approach is vital. Team members can provide assistance in the form of data, strategies, equipment, material and extra services. There needs to be sufficient time to share knowledge, successes, and frustrations for mainstreaming to be successful. Providing the time is an important administrative responsibility. Districts with successful collaborative teaming arrangements from periodic consultation, to co-teaching in elementary, middle and high school (within individual subjects generally no more than two per special education teacher), to resource arrangements of at least 50 percent of the time in regular classes, all provide between one to two weeks for preparation time, site visitations, and time for local model building before teaming begins. Districts also offer a commitment of up to a full day of planning time per month for all staff involved in a full inclusion model of services. Typically within three to six months staff were able to accomodate planning within their regular schedule of interaction and no longer needed this monthly planning day.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Provide on-going classroom support. Be creative with resources.
2. Encourage collaborative teaching at every opportunity
3. Provide ample planning time for staff members interested in collaborative teaming.
4. Dedicate a few minutes at staff meetings to recognize teaming efforts and for teachers to share successful experiences.
5. Arrange workshops for special education staff to share "tools of the trade" for working with students with disabilities. Classroom teachers will discover that many of the creative ideas suggested are applicable to their work with all children.
6. Arrange workshops for classroom teachers to share successful collaborative techniques with others in the district.
7. Arrange for teacher visitation to sites where inclusion and collaborative teaming are operating successfully.

8. Regularly visit classrooms to show support for their efforts. Follow-up the visit with a "You are Appreciated!" note to the teacher(s).
9. When filling an opening in an inclusion classroom, consider hiring a teachers with dual certification.

**Are there specific teaching strategies/models that are particularly beneficial for students with disabilities?**

Selection of teaching strategies depends upon the particular needs of the child. Any specific strategies for students with disabilities would need to be individualized to the degree that they meet the needs of the child according to his/her particular learning style. The recommendations section of the IEP should include some helpful suggestions.

In general, the activities should be broken down into small steps to ensure regular feelings of accomplishment. Visual and/or auditory cues should be used when necessary to accommodate individual learning styles. Thought also needs to be given to environmental factors that might affect the student's learning. I f the student is having difficulty: terminate, demonstrate, practice, and continue.

Mnemonic devices and grouping materials often help students to organize information for learning. Other possible classroom modifications include providing extended time if needed to complete assignments, repeating directions, recording answers for self-checking, transferring answers, oral testing, and using auditory and visual aids at appropriate intervals.

A teaching model that is growing in popularity and has helped teachers with instruction of all students is cooperative learning. Interactions are planned that involve disabled and nondisabled students in which the goals are reached only if the group works together to achieve them. It is important that the teacher directly teach collaborative skills to make groups function effectively. Successful group experiences engage students in both academic and social learning.

Another instructional model enjoying success is peer tutoring. In some cases, classroom peers or students in the same building are paired with students with disabilities. When appropriate, students with disabilities are paired with younger students and given the tutor role. Some elementary schools receive help from tutors at the secondary level. Occasionally, secondary schools offer credit to secondary students who train for the role of tutor or "buddy" of a student with disabilities.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Visit classes to celebrate social and academic successes as they are in progress.
2. Request written/verbal monthly reports from teachers on the progress of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.
3. Provide in-service for the staff on cooperative learning, tutoring techniques, and/or learning styles. Give college or noncollege credit for the sessions as an additional incentive.
4. Provide ample planning time for teachers who are teaming for instruction.
5. Contact other local schools to arrange tutoring help for disabled and nondisabled students.
6. Contact nursing homes and retired citizens in the community to seek additional help with tutoring.
7. Arrange for after school tutoring for all students. Provide transportation.

**Should grading scales be adjusted for special education students who can't meet regular standards?**

It is not necessary to lower expectations and standards for mainstreamed students. Nor is it necessary to alter basic course objectives. Rather, instructional adaptations should be provided, if needed. There are five general disabling categories: cognitive, physical, communicative, sensory, and emotional/behavioral. Most mainstreamed students will have difficulty in collecting or processing information, but they will not be incapable of learning.

Many mainstreamed students are not successful in taking tests. Therefore, students who are failing due to test anxiety or due to the nature of their disability may need to have tests given orally or have the directions, items, or design altered somewhat to enable them to communicate their knowledge of the skills being tested. Disabled students need to meet the basic standards just as the other students, but teaching techniques may need to be modified and noted on the student's IEP.

**What is the community-based instruction and when is it appropriate?**

Community-based instruction takes learning for students with disabilities beyond classroom instruction to experiences in community settings. Job sites are identified through a community needs assessment. Students with disabilities are matched to the job based on their ability to successfully function and the students interests. The students work in the community for a part of each school day. The rich experiences will help to provide a smooth transition to postschool life. If students with disabilities are to take their rightful place in society as contributing members of the community, then they must be provided with appropriate experiences during their school life.

While some districts begin limited community-based experiences in elementary school, most programs begin in earnest at the secondary level. For the older students (ages 16-21), the need is even greater because their age-appropriate peers are already living and working in the community. Students in community-based instruction programs develop relationships with people in their own communities which should enhance the possibility of acceptance and inclusion after school.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Conduct a needs assessment of the job sites in the community.
2. Assign students with disabilities tasks in school that closely match the tasks expected of them on the job. Practicing on-the-job skills will ensure greater success when at work in the community.
3. Inform parents about adult services and programs and how to help their children access those services after graduation.
4. Involve community agencies in the development of a written transition plan (from school to the world of work) as part of the IEP process for students 14-16 years of age and then 16-21 years of age.
5. Work to build relationships with area employers in order to provide a variety of work training opportunities.
6. Distribute program goals and accomplishments to the public.
7. Become familiar with the district's interagency agreements and available reference materials on transition. If the district does not provide these materials, request that special education specialists produce a basic guide for your use.
8. Consider having a staff member assume responsibility for transition and vocational planning and placement as a part of his/her job description.

## PLACEMENT

### Can the process of placement be streamlined?

The process for placement is mandated by Section 459 of The Regulations Implementing the Exceptional Children's Act. Any streamlining would need to be done with careful consideration of the guidelines of the laws that dictate the process.

It is also important to remember that determining the eligibility of a child for special education services is a very important process that should be performed with special care. Streamlining may lead to excessive referrals and misidentification. In lieu of considering special education referral as a first option for students experiencing difficulty, teachers should be encouraged to seek advice from a pre-referral or student assistance team. Besides providing immediate feedback and suggestions to the teacher for her consideration, the assistance team can supply the special education assessment team with important data if a referral is deemed appropriate.

### How can I be sure that special education students are placed in the least restrictive environment?

The decision regarding the least restrictive environment rests on the shoulders of the members of the special education placement committee. Based on a review of all parts of the summary report, the principal or his/her designee, in collaboration with the parents and members of the multidisciplinary team determines the maximum extent possible that a student can remain with nondisabled students. Regular reviews are scheduled to re-evaluate placement and consider who are sensitive to the need for extending mainstreaming opportunities for students with disabilities. Regular classroom teachers should be encouraged to collaborate regularly with supportive services personnel regarding student progress.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Attend eligibility meetings as often as possible.
2. Request minutes or a brief summary of any meetings that you are unable to attend.
3. Make periodic contact with parents of students who are on the list for assessment. Encourage the members of the assessment team to solicit parental assistance by requesting information that may add additional insights during the process of data collection. Parents can often provide information about the attitudes or behaviors at home that may help in determining the least restrictive environment at school.
4. Monitor mainstreamed situations to support movement to less restrictive environments whenever possible. Provide intrinsic rewards to teachers who exhibit concern for "less restrictive" rather than "more restrictive" environments for students.

### What is the difference between a slow learner and a learning disabled student?

Slow learners exhibit mild deficits in all areas with standard scores generally in the 70's. A slow learner does not have a discrepancy between achievement and potential. She/he is learning at or about his/her potential, but at a slower rate than the average students. The slow learner needs additional help but is not eligible for special education services.

Learning disabled students, on the other hand, have at least one significant deficit and at least one significant strength in ability which indicates that she/he is not working up to potential. In other words, there is a discrepancy between the achievement level and the potential. The learning disabled student requires a different learning strategy in order to achieve in the area that needs development.

## LEGAL ISSUES

**What are the legal implications for general education staff as they become more involved with special education students? What do they need to know?**

The unique laws and regulations for disabled students give cause for some apprehension by teachers who are unfamiliar with special education. Anxiety comes from lack of knowledge or lack of understanding. Teachers need to know that processes are in place to ensure that laws and regulations are followed. They need to know the local and state monitoring of special education programs determines if educators in the schools are in compliance with the regulations, and when they are not, time is given to take corrective action.

As an educator, conflicts may occur with students or parents that require due process to be resolved. In the case of such a conflict with a special education student or parent, the issues may be unique because the student is disabled, but the legal implications are no different than those for nondisabled students. Teachers need to be reminded that, first and foremost, students with disabilities are people that have the same rights and privileges as nondisabled students. They need to be reassured that their typical teaching behaviors should provide an appropriate program for all children.

All staff members need to know that laws and regulations for students with disabilities exist. They should be somewhat knowledgeable of the regulations that apply to the students in their charge. But, more importantly, teachers should be confident that there are resource persons in the school who can provide them with information and support when needed.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Provide optional special education law inservices for the staff. Offer noncollege credit as an additional incentive.
2. Stay current on laws affecting special education and inform the staff via staff newsletters or staff meetings. Updates may serve to lower anxiety for those who are particularly apprehensive.
3. Include basic information about special education in the general school handbook and devote time to the material during orientations.
4. Pair a teacher who is experiencing some anxiety about mainstreaming with a mentor teacher.
5. Work to set up a team teaching arrangement with an apprehensive teacher and a special education teacher with a supporting attitude.
6. Include classroom teachers in IEP conferences to increase knowledge and ownership.
7. Require all responsible teachers to attend parent conferences for students included in their general education classroom.

**The laws governing special education are so extensive. What is a good resource for principals?**

A copy of the state regulations is an excellent resource; however, it can be cumbersome to use as a practical guide. The local guide may serve as a more useful resource at the building level. Should problems arise of a more difficult nature, specialists in the area of special education should be contacted for interpretation. Resource persons on special education law include the board attorney, the attorney at the Department of Education, legal counsel for the local and state professional organizations, and local special education program administrators.

There are also a number of journals and newsletters that publish current issues being discussed in the field and court cases being heard at both state and federal levels. The EHLRC Education of Handicapped Law Report is one such publication. State department newsletters and bulletins often include special education matters as well.

**What do the laws say about the inclusion of students with severe disabilities?**

The laws are the same for these students as they are for all students with disabilities. Disabled students should be educated with nondisabled students to the maximum extent possible for each individual. Every student has the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment and provided with necessary resources to ensure successful inclusion in that setting.

## RESOURCES

A number of resources are involved in the shared responsibility required to successfully include students in general education programs. They are: principal, psychologists, social workers, librarians, therapists, paraprofessionals, community volunteers, and professional organizations. This plethora of resources suggests the end of the isolation of a teacher and 30 students in a classroom. In its place, there is a team approach orchestrated by the teacher to fill the needs of all children.

**How can finite resources satisfy an infinite number of special education needs?**

Resources are a constant problem in education. In many cases, the only alternative is to make creative use of the funds that are available. In applying creativity to planning for the purpose of stretching the dollar, a surprising outcome has often been the improvement of educational opportunities for all children. For example, reducing the number of special education classrooms can lead to additional funds being available. The funds could be used for strengthening the factors that contribute to more flexible classrooms which are condusive to learning for disabled and nondisabled students. The hiring of additional paraprofessionals, as an example, would allow more time for consultation, tutoring, and teaming.

Special attention to scheduling and instructional organization can also maximize the use of funds for space, materials, and personnel. "Spending smarter" rather than "spending more" may be the answer to producing better educational programs for all children.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Utilize multidisciplinary teams to brainstorm creative use of available resources. Be flexible enough to allow risk taking on the part of the staff as long as student outcomes will be positively affected.
2. Reconsider the existing budget based on the recommendations of the committees. Reallocate, if necessary.
3. Allow your mind to wander beyond the boundaries of the traditional paradigm for use of instructional resources. Network with other adventuresome colleagues.

**What building modifications will be necessary to meet standards?**

All areas of the building must be made accessible to students with disabilities. The location for special education classes should be based on the accessibility to daily school activities rather than accessibility to existing ramps or exits. Federal courts have ruled that funding difficulties cannot be used as an excuse for not complying with the law. Plan the best possible program for all the students—then call for the building and maintenance crew work on modifying the building to your specifications.

**Education for persons with severe disabilities requires costly equipment, special service personnel and lower teacher/pupil ratios. Won't these added expenses make less money available to provide quality programs for general education?**

School systems have been responsible for funding the education for students with severe disabilities since P.L. 94-142 was enacted in 1975. Therefore, even if students with disabilities have not

been in local schools the school system has been paying for staff, equipment, and special services. Instead of spending more money proportionately, integration of students with disabilities should only require a reallocation of money already earmarked for students in special education.

Some districts have reported that savings have been possible when programs were integrated. Providing classes in the community schools is less expensive than paying tuition and transportation fees to private schools or other school systems. Money can be saved by not having to duplicate administrative staff, cafeteria or transportation in dual programs. The money can then be allocated to local school programs. Generally, initial costs for training and transitions will be required.

## MAINSTREAMING

Mainstreaming is a difficult concept to reduce to a definition. It is more an attitudinal or value-oriented position that allows the teacher to examine each child and provide an appropriate way to develop, expand, and refine the student's intellectual, social, and emotional skills....The notion of least restrictive environment supports this concept by requiring that appropriate settings be found for students with disabilities. ((Herlihy, 1980)

### What is the difference between integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion as it relates to special education?

Integration is allowing students with disabilities to have access to, be included in, and participate in the activities of the total school environment; i.e., use of the same buses, hallways, restrooms, cafeterias, libraries, and attend dances, assemblies, storytimes, films and music, art and physical education classes with age appropriate peers. Integration means placing students with disabilities in the local school building but not necessarily in the same classrooms as non-disabled students. Mainstreaming means placing students with disabilities in some classrooms with non-disabled students for academic instruction and/or socialization with appropriate resources. Inclusion refers to the practice of placing all students, regardless of their disabilities, in general education classrooms that are age and grade appropriate. Special education supports are provided within the context of the general education class and in other integrated environments.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Provide opportunities for the faculty and staff to discuss integration in light of consensus values and belief statements.
2. Create a special support group of faculty and staff for the purpose of brainstorming and facilitating integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion efforts
3. Contact special education services to assist in identifying students with disabilities who reside in the community but are being served in other schools/facilities.
4. Determine what resources would be needed to provide educational services in the home school. Discuss with the staff the feasibility of "bringing them home."
5. Review with the support group the integration/mainstreaming/ inclusion efforts currently going on in the building. Brainstorm other possible ways to deliver the same services in a less restrictive environment. Review the IEPs of any students who would be affected and take appropriate action to activate the positive changes.
6. Review the literature on pull-out programs. Share the results with the faculty/staff and move in the direction of providing resource services in the regular classroom setting.
7. Continue to monitor the integrated situations to facilitate adjustments and provide resources as needed.

**Why is it necessary to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms if they need special attention to help them learn and grow?**

The impetus for the mainstreaming movement comes from the normalization principle which posits that students with disabilities must be provided with experiences that approximate as closely as possible the experiences of normal society. Integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion are vehicles that allow students to develop meaningful skills and achieve realistic outcomes within the school and community.

One of the primary goals of education is preparation for postschool life. Education in isolation has not successfully prepared students with disabilities for life in the mainstream. Students with disabilities have difficulty transferring learning from the segregated setting to real life; therefore, integration becomes a necessity to accomplish the goal of schooling. The problem of the disability must be taken from the shoulders of the child and be placed on the belief that all students have the right to be integrated into community life.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Use videotapes like Joel Barker's "Discovering the Future" (to generate meaningful dialogue concerning paradigm shifts) and "Regular Lives" (to facilitate discussions about a new paradigm in special education).
2. Arrange for faculty visitation to other settings where integration and mainstreaming are enjoying success. Accompanying them whenever possible. Encourage them to focus on critical success factors of the observed program(s).
3. Create opportunities to discuss how an effective school can accomplish its goals for all children.
4. Encourage idea sharing.
5. Involve parents in discussions of the changing paradigm.

**Why spend so much time and money to identify and place students in special education and then turn around and include them in regular education classrooms?**

In 1975, P.L. 94-142 mandated that states provide a "free and appropriate public education to all students in the least restrictive environment." In response, many states established centralized, segregated sites for students with severe disabilities with provision for specialized services to meet their unique and varied needs. Students with mild disabilities were most often served in regular school settings, but not always in neighborhood schools. Even those in home schools were relegated to portable units or other isolated areas of the building. Over time it was realized, however, that by not being provided the opportunity to attend the same schools and interact with non-disabled peers on a regular basis, students with disabilities were unprepared for life as adults in the community.

The traditional paradigm for educating youngsters with disabilities is one that supports segregated settings. The shift to the inclusive school model which promotes social integration and academic mainstreaming is supported by research and practice. Appropriate educational services can be provided in regular school buildings to meet the needs of students with even the most severe disabilities if appropriate resources are provided.

Learning new skills is only one objective of public school education. Other skills include making friends, making choices, and learning to respect and value likenesses and differences in others. Integrated buildings/classrooms have enjoyed enhanced school climates, invigorated staffs, increased self-confidence and self esteem for students, and the schools as communities have shown greater sensitivity to the society at large. Teachers alone have a difficult if not impossible job of teaching all of the significant life behaviors. The disabled student's peers are more likely to encourage the learning of appropriate life behaviors.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Consider the current physical arrangement of the building in terms of the new concept for delivery of special education services. Set time lines for rearranging classes in need of increased socialization through integration in daily activities.
2. Encourage visitation between students in regular and special education classes to increase interaction with age appropriate peers, particularly in those situations where central location of special education classes is not immediately possible.
3. Emphasize that general school activities are for all students. Giving special invitations to special education classes suggest a school serving two separate populations.
4. Model one staff for all children.

**With all the time, attention, and money being spent on students with disabilities, isn't it possible that the non-disabled students will be shortchanged in the end?**

A frequent concern of administrators, teachers, and parents is that the non-disabled students will in some way be adversely affected by the inclusion of students with disabilities. In reality, integrated programs provide any number of benefits to all children.

a. provides education of future service providers; i.e., non-disabled students currently attending school, who will one day be teachers, social workers, doctors, and other service providers.
b. provides education for future parents of children with disabilities.
c. provides a realistic perspective of individual differences.
d. provides opportunities for non-disabled students to assume responsibilities by assisting students with disabilities.
e. enhances non-disabled students' ability to function socially with a variety of individuals.
f. helps non-disabled students gain an understanding and sensitivity to the special needs of students involved.
g. offers rewarding friendships for all students involved.
h. breaks down stereotypes.
i. fosters awareness and acceptance in the formative years. (Beers, 1988)

**What about teacher certification and funding?**

Collaborative instructional models occasionally raise concerns about teacher certification and program funding. Public monies are set aside to educate all children; however, an additional supplement is given by the federal government to help in the education of students with disabilities. There are stipulations about how the money is used which often affects overall use of materials and personnel. In an effort to facilitate integration and make the most effective use of personnel in the education of all children, states like Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania have made provisions for a more generic certification. It is hoped that other states will follow. In order to provide the best possible education to all children, professionals will need to be able to cooperate without regard to level of teaching status.

Reacting to the 1989 President's Summit on Education, Bob Robertson, Indiana Department of Education (ISEAS Cable, 1990) suggested that one of the results of the conference may be more flexibility in "where" and "how" special education teachers can be used. Relaxation of the present structure in many states will have a positive impact on the working relationship of teachers and the regular education initiative.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Insure special education staff have a designated caseload, update IEP's regardless of the nature of the individual student service package.
2. Encourage teachers who are interested in pairing for team teaching. Reward their efforts and celebrate their successes.
3. Set up informal networks for teachers within the school and from other schools to share ideas. Support visitation by providing classroom coverage.

**What is the nature of the staff development that might be helpful in the mainstreaming effort?**

Teachers who are assigned students with disabilities but are not given the necessary preparation and support often develop a negative attitude toward mainstreaming. The general school morale may ultimately be affected and the loss to the students will be immeasurable. Preparation for teachers and students is essential. Whenever possible, teachers and students should be given the tools to work with students with disabilities before receiving the students. Classroom teachers would benefit from learning new strategies for individualizing instruction, developing skills to diagnose students needs, developing appropriate attitudes toward students needs, and developing appropriate attitudes toward students with disabilities that encourage independence rather than caretaking.

If the district is focusing on inclusion or the regular education initiative, system wide goals may include plans for workshops for classroom teachers working with mainstreamed students. Ideally, budget monies would be set aside for hiring of substitutes so the sessions would be on-going and during contract hours. In any case, local schools will need to make plans to supplement the limited in-service that can be conducted by the district.

The most obvious (though not always the most desirable or timely) opportunities for professional development are those times scheduled in the calendar like teacher work days or staff meeting days. However, there are many less formal opportunities for providing useful information to teachers of mainstreamed students. Joint planning sessions with special education teachers, optional small group brainstorming sessions before and after school or during planning time can provide many useful suggestions.

One of the most powerful learning situations for teachers is observing other teachers who are engaging in successful mainstreaming. Teaming with a special education teacher and observing lessons before assuming full responsibility for more challenging students is another way to develop new skills. Teachers with background in special education need to be aware of their daily role in providing others with information as a function of their informal in-service roles. The more informal sessions are subtle but very helpful in fostering integration. The sessions should emphasize the things a student can do. Teachers working with mainstreamed students need honest answers about the academic expectations for students they are teaching, but the emphasis should be on the positive.

*Principal Practices that work:*

1. Facilitate faculty planning of formal and informal professional development activities with a focus based on group needs. Encourage creative use of time and offer support in the way of personnel, funding, and offer release time, when possible.
2. Utilize the expertise of in-house special education staff to provide instructional models and techniques. A sharing of ideas and talents will help support a one school with <u>one</u> staff for <u>all</u> children atmosphere.

Mainstreaming has many antecedents. Treatment of and provision for disabled youngsters has gone through many metamorphoses: from neglect, to isolation in residential setting, to special classes, and now to progressive inclusion. History reflects a number of changes in beneficence of society, to the present thrust of aggressive assertion of rights...in an effort to obtain the rights of children for full participation in the mainstream of American society. (Rocha and Sanford, "Mainstreaming: Democracy in Action")

THE

# PRINCIPAL LETTERS:

## PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

*Edited by: Leonard C. Burrello, Ed.D. and Pamela Wright*

**Dear Colleagues:**

It's time to renew your subscription to *The Principal Letters* for the 1992-93 school year. As you know, we're a quarterly newsletter, written by principals who are working toward delivering quality education to all students, including those with disabilities. We hope to again offer stimulating and relevant information from those who know you the best. . . your colleagues. We look forward to having you with us in the year to come.

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The fall newsletter will examine numerous aspects of Special Education and how it relates to your role as Principal. Teacher relationships, parent relationships, behavior management, instructional strategies, legal issues and resources are a few of the topics which will be addressed.

### Winter 1992
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A Wisconsin school principal and his staff will provide interesting insights into including behaviorally challenging students in schools. Some exciting and innovative strategies have proven successful and will be described in this issue.

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This letter will focus on two key issues which principals face when working toward meeting the needs of all students, including those with disabilities, in their own schools. Funding management and administrative relations are the issues that will be examined from a principal's and director's point of view.

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